

Key Take Aways

Conference on Food Safety and Environmental Toxins, Feb 20-21, 2013

Inaugural Session

There is a need to move India's public health policy towards prevention, focusing on water and sanitation, safe food and clean environment. Role of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) should be recast to move beyond disease control.

Independent labs are needed to support community struggles on pollution and health issues.

Policy-making in India is still largely within government. There is a need to evolve a transparent process to involve expertise from the civil society.

Overhauling of pesticide regulations

Pesticide registration needs to be moved from the purview of Ministry of Agriculture to Ministry of Health or Ministry of Environment with bio-safety as the main mandate.

There is a need to review all registered pesticides taking into account comparative risk assessment (especially for vulnerable groups like children) and deregister toxic and obsolete pesticides.

There is a need to review and set Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for all pesticides in all relevant food commodities including processed and packaged foods based on Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI).

Report on the status of pesticide contamination in the country should be published annually. The process of monitoring pesticide contamination should be transparent with participation of the civil society.

Recommendations of state agricultural universities to the farmers should be monitored and systems should be setup to take strict action for prescribing illegal pesticides.

There is a need to enforce laws strictly.

Organic Farming

Organic and non-pesticide farming is showing encouraging results across the country. However, the support of the governments to these practices is negligible. Slowly subsidies should be moved away from pesticide and fertilizers towards ecologically sustainable alternatives both at production at market ends. Training for farmers and recasting of extension is the key for this.

There is a need to build policies/models/systems keeping in mind that India has small farms.

Body Burden

There is a need for periodic bio-monitoring to establish chemical body burden and using the results to regulate use of chemicals.

Antibiotics and Growth Promoters

Use of antibiotics and other growth promoters in food production is now a major public health concern.

Research in this area is very poor and so are regulations.

An action plan to generate information for credible action is needed

Junk food

There is a need for an appropriate regulatory framework to monitor junk food advertisements specifically targeted to children

Enabling people to make informed choices is crucial and hence strengthening labeling norms specifically related to nutritional information is urgently needed.

Public awareness is to be a priority; campaigns should be aggressive on the lines of alcohol and tobacco.

Junk food should be banned in schools.

Food Safety Regulations

There is a need to strengthen consumer groups and better organize street food sector.

Others:

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is planning to harmonise our standards with CODEX. We believe harmonisation is not needed, what is needed is to use CODEX as a guide and developing our own standards based on our food habits, nutritional status, and diversity.

There is a need to develop regulations and regulatory capacity to check imported food commodities.

Agenda for CSE

1. Enhancing capacity within the pollution monitoring lab to support more communities.
2. Developing a training programme and handbook for the community on food safety and toxins including simple analytical techniques.
3. Convening a group to look at how medical education can incorporate issues related to food safety and environmental contamination.
4. Programme to involve Communities and local educational institutions in monitoring pollution